

November 19, 2015

The Honorable Barack Obama  
President of the United States  
The White House  
Washington, D.C. 20500

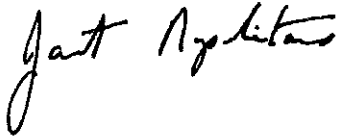
Dear Mr. President:

Following the creation of the Department of Homeland Security, substantial progress has been made in protecting our nation's homeland. The ongoing efforts by our national security experts have provided tools and resources to make a coordinated attack like the one in Paris last week much more difficult to achieve here at home. As a nation, we have strengthened security at our air, land, and sea ports; we have strengthened the ability to monitor the travel of bad actors and detect fraud in our visa process; we have strengthened partnerships with state and local law enforcement across the nation to ensure that they are prepared; and we have engaged with minority and ethnic communities to prevent homegrown radicalization.


As former Secretaries of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, it is our view that the American people are safer due to these efforts, but the Paris attacks remind us that we must remain ever-vigilant in this effort and that the highest priority of our government is to keep American's safe. It is our view that we can achieve this mission in a manner that is consistent with American values of openness and inclusiveness. With respect to refugees seeking to resettle here, it is our view that we can admit the most vulnerable of these refugees into this country safely as long as we do not compromise the already established protections. The process for any refugee seeking entry to the United States requires the highest level of scrutiny from a law enforcement and national security perspective. The process takes place while the refugees are still overseas, and it is lengthy and deliberate – taking an average of 18-24 months with no waiver of any steps. First, we consider only the most vulnerable -- particularly survivors of violence and torture, those with severe medical conditions, and women and children – for potential admittance to the U.S. Once a candidate is selected they are subjected to biographic and biometric security reviews based on the latest intelligence from the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the National Counterterrorism Center, the FBI's Terrorist Screening Center, the Department of State, and the Department of Defense. If they pass these national security checks, they will then be personally interviewed by specially trained DHS personnel to ensure they are qualified for admittance. They are then subjected to recurrent vetting up to the final point of departure and a final interview at the border before being admitted into the U.S.

The process that is currently in place is thorough and robust and, so long as it is fully implemented and not diluted, it will allow us to safely admit the most vulnerable refugees while protecting the American people. Fortunately, these goals are not mutually exclusive.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Janet Napolitano".

Janet Napolitano  
Former Secretary (2009-2013)  
Department of Homeland Security

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Michael Chertoff".

Michael Chertoff  
Former Secretary (2005-2009)  
Department of Homeland Security